

Side Peter Brown

Lou Reed's new *Magic and Loss* (Sire/Warner Bros.) is a concept album about death and dying, inspired by the loss of two friends to Cancer within a year. Reed sings about their struggles to survive -- their triumphs and their pain and his own feelings as a friend having to watch and then dealing with the loss.

To his credit, Reed pulls this off without sentimentality or pathos. Even when he writes, "If I close my eyes I can't believe that I'm here without you," on "Dreamin'," or describes how "he watched them from the corner removing things from your apartment," the feeling is of shared pain, and in that pain a sharing of life's experiences. Reed mourns, but is never mournful.

Instead of sentiment, Reed delivers searing songs charged with emotion and intensity such as "What's Good" and "Power and Glory." The "this is no longer a working number" chorus of "Gassed and Stoked" hits hard and deep.

He lightens up only once on "Harry's Circumcision," a black-humored talk-song about a friend's failed suicide, that I'm not sure belongs on this album, except in its contrast of dying people wanting to live and living people wanting to die.

For a good deal of the album, Reed holds back his own emotions, while describing graphically what the Cancer and the treatment is doing to his friends and their courage and humor in dealing with it till finally he lets loose with his own anger on "Warrior King."

Magic and Loss while not an easy listen is one of Reed's most powerful works. It's an album of healing and coming to terms as the title track, subtitled "The Summation"

(more)

2 Side Brown demonstrates. It's as real as it gets. Only Lou Reed would have the balls to do this and the genius to pull it off.

"What's Good," which sets the tone for *Magic and Loss* also appears on the soundtrack for Wim Wenders' new film *Until The End of the World* (Warner Bros.). This album features some of the best musicians in current rock performing primarily new songs and works as a sampler of new music. In addition to Reed, standouts include "The Adversary" by Crime and the City Solution, "Fretless" by R.E.M., Elvis Costello doing a Ray Davies song, "Days" a new song from T-Bone Burnett, "Humans From Earth, and a great song from Daniel Lanois, "Sleeping In The Devil's Bed."

While not every song makes it, for a soundtrack it hangs together pretty well and is worth checking out.

Emmylou Harris *At the Ryman* (Reprise) serves as Harris' first live album and also to introduce her new acoustic group, The Nash Ramblers. Harris' recent studio efforts have been for the most part lackluster, so recording her live at the original home of the Grand Ole Opry was inspired, as was her move to acoustic music. One of her best albums was the bluegrass *Roses in the Snow*, and while this album and her new band are not strictly bluegrass, the influence of that music revitalizes her sound and approach.

Another smart move was her choice of material. Instead of going for new songs the selection is either standards and/or well known songs ranging from Hank Williams' "Half (more)

3 Side Brown

As Much" to Bruce Springsteen's "Mansion on the Hill."

There are several standouts including the Johnny Cash cover, "Guess Things Happen That Way," John Fogerty's "Lodi," Stonewall Jackson's "Smoke Along the Track," and Nanci Griffith's "It's A Hard Life Wherever You Go" which is a natural for Harris, who should do more of her songs.

The Nash Ramblers, like all the versions of her earlier Hot Band are all musical aces including Sam Bush, founder of New Grass Revival on mandolin and fiddle, Roy Huskey Jr., on bass, Al Perkins, (formerly of Manassas) on dobro, former Seatrain drummer, Larry Atamaniuk, and newcomer Jon Randall Stewart on guitar. Everyone sings.

The group excels at both traditional songs like Stephen Foster's "Hard Times," perhaps the standout track and at making newer songs such as the O'Kane's "If I Could Be There," sound traditional.

The other exceptional song is the Bill Monroe/Peter Rowan, "Walls of Time," the funkier track on the album. The harmonies are close to chilling and more songs in this vein such as the other Monroe number, "Get Up John" is what this group should be doing, instead of merely passable versions of Steve Earle's "Guitar Town," or "Abraham, Martin and John" unfortunately tagged on at the end of the Nanci Griffith song.

While the harmonies are often more folksy than country, Harris for the most part is in great form making this her best album in years.

(more)

4 Side Brown

Chubby Carrier, who appears tonight at the Barbary with his Bayou Swamp Band is one of the most energetic singers in a style of music where energy is the hallmark. His Boogie Woogie Zydeco (Flying Fish) never lets up even on the ballads as his nonstop accordion is propelled by the rocking and soulful guitar of David LeJeune.

Carrier's sound is fairly traditional, but that doesn't mean boring. He is a strong singer and the beat to his music whether a two step, a boogie or a ballad is insistent. There are several standouts on the album such as "Bernadette" with a chorus that has touches of African music, "Madelaine" and Boozo Chavis' "Dog Hill." As with all Zydeco, be ready to dance.